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THE

Commonweal

PAUL CLAUDEL:

Vocation of the Poet

by Wallace Fowlie

The Universal Artist

by J. P. Manship

The Intolerance of Genius

by Martin Turnell

Volume LXII, No. 8 May 27, 1955 Twenty Cents

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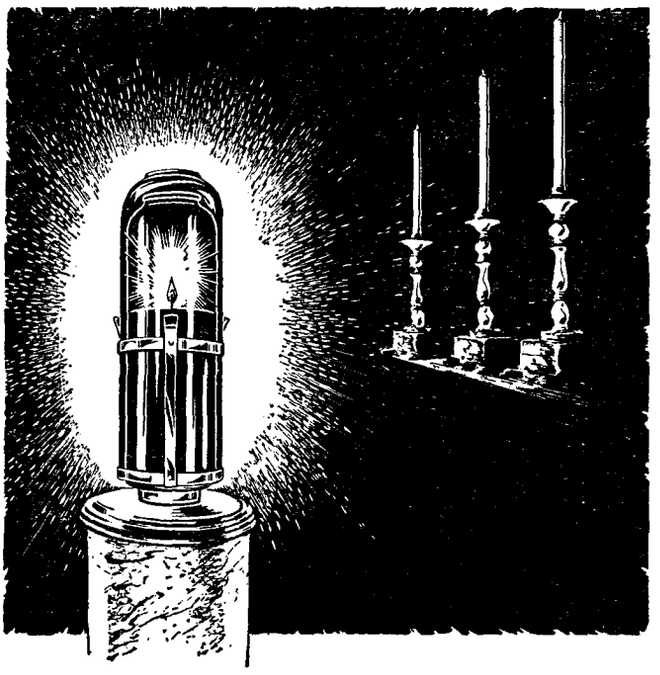

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386 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 16

Editor
EDWARD S. SKILLIN

Managing Editor
JAMES O'GARA

Associate Editors
WILLIAM P. CLANCY, WILLIAM PFAFF

Contributing Editors
PHILIP BURNHAM
JOHN C. CORT
ANNE FREMANTLE
PHILIP T. HARTUNG
RICHARD HAYES

JOHN BRUBAKER: *Advertising Manager*

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Orange, Conn., under the act of March 3, 1879. Published weekly, printed and copyrighted 1955, in the U. S. A. by the Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc., 386 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y., MUrray Hill 3-9685.

U. S. and Canada, $7.50 a year. Foreign, $9.50. Single copies 20¢

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The Commonweal

week by week

DISENGAGEMENT

PRESIDENT Eisenhower is a political phenomenon the like of which America may never have seen before. He is not mad at anybody, at least on the surface, and very few people—mostly Republicans—are mad at him. Senators from the West and Northwest, and liberals of all varieties, can lament over the Administration's domestic program. But the relevancy of tideland oil or Hell's Canyon to the resident of Illinois or Pennsylvania is hard to dramatize, and most Americans are apparently too busy to listen.

The paramount issue of our time is that of war or peace. The great peril is poised outside the country, and the American voter is apparently judging the President almost entirely in terms of his conduct in international affairs. And on this score Mr. Eisenhower seems to be doing astonishingly well. Perhaps never before in modern times has an American President had the country so firmly united behind him.

This national unity has made it possible for Mr. Eisenhower to act in the field of foreign policy with a flexibility that would certainly have been denied to his predecessor. He concluded a peace in Korea, the terms of which would have split the country into two warring camps if Harry Truman had ordered them. He talked of peace when war seemed imminently possible. He appointed a leading member of his Administration as "Secretary of Peace" and gave him Cabinet status to work on the problems of disarmament. He dared to carry on secret diplomacy by personal letter to his "old friend," Marshal Zhukov. (Imagine the storm if it were disclosed that Harry Truman had carried on a secret personal correspondence with his "old friend," J. Stalin!) At this writing it seems quite possible that Mr. Eisenhower will go down in the history books as the President of the Great Disengagement.

Going into the probable Big Four conference, then, President Eisenhower is in an enviable position. He has behind him an incalculable asset, the support of a united nation. Whatever the ingredients of his popularity, it is a fact, and a matter of prime importance. Mr. Eisenhower will soon be in a position to test Soviet intentions for the immediate future, to weigh Russian words against actions, possibly to prepare the way for some easing of international tensions. And this is something for which all Americans—and, indeed, the world—can be grateful.

Are there dangers in a Big Four Meeting? Of course there are, and Mr. Eisenhower must be as well aware of them as anyone else. These fears arise from the reality of the situation, not—as some of his right-wing Republican colleagues intimate—from any danger that Mr. Eisenhower will sacrifice principle for the deliberate practice of appeasement.

THE President is certainly not so naive as to believe that the Soviet will change its spots overnight. Deeds, rather than words, will be the test of Communist intentions—just as the Soviet turnabout on a peace treaty with Austria was a deed necessary if a Big Four meeting was to be justified. It is true that the Soviet never loses sight of its long-range goal. But that does not mean negotiations to ease immediate tensions should not take place. The policy of the West must continue to aim at reducing, by legitimate means, the chances of all-out war.

At best, war can only clear the ground, remove those conditions and rulers which make impossible the task of building a just and lasting peace. The nature of modern war has made this task of building a peaceful world after war even more difficult, and now that both the Soviet Union and the Western alliance have the H-bomb, large-scale war seems to have become almost useless as a practical instrument of national policy. It is hard to see how this could be otherwise, since the consequences of such a war seem to involve evils incomparably greater than the admittedly very real evils of the status quo.

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What, then, can we hope for? If one judges by Austria, the Soviet Union is now interested in a ring of neutralized buffer states in Europe. Once Austria is out of the way, the Russians will probably turn their blandishments on Germany, while they continue their present negotiations with Tito. No one imagines that altruism is at the root of this change in policy. In this matter, as in all others, the rulers of the Soviet Union are being guided by self-interest. But since it is also to the interest of the West to reduce the area of tension and to lessen the possibilities of general war, this is all to the good.

Writing in the N. Y. *Times Magazine* some weeks ago, Arnold Toynbee discussed World War II. One of the things it settled, he said, was that the political unification of the world was not going to be achieved by the Nazis. What it did not settle was whether this unification is to be done through the fighting of World War III. That great issue remains; disengagement and a Big Four parley will leave it unsettled still. As far as the Big Four meeting is concerned, we are confident that Mr. Eisenhower will meet its challenges well and bravely. The real test, however, lies ahead, and for more than Mr. Eisenhower. The Soviet Union may be seeking a breathing spell, to last a few years, or a decade, or even more. If that is true, the purpose and dedication of the Western alliance will be put to a hard test, for in many respects the ways of a cold peace are harder than those of the cold war. If disengagement and competitive co-survival are to be the order of the day, our emphasis must remain more on competition than on survival.

NEXT WEEK

MICHAEL P. FOGARTY tells of present and future possibilities of increasing food production in a hungry world.

"It seems likely, however, that food supplies can be expanded to keep pace with population only if population-growth follows its 'normal' curve. In primitive societies a woman may perhaps give birth to five to seven children on the average. But, due to high infant and general death rates, few survive, and the population does not grow. Then, in the stage of 'early industrialization' comes medical science, and brings death rates down. Birth rates remain high, and the population increases very fast: it may double, or more than double, in a generation. Many underdeveloped countries are in, or reaching, that stage now."

PAUL CLAUDEL

THE death of Paul Claudel on Ash Wednesday of this year was not much noticed in the American press, and what small notice there was seemed to miss the point. The obituary in the New York *Times,* for example, spoke at some length of Claudel's diplomatic career but mentioned his career as a Christian intellectual and man of letters only in passing. Reading it, one might have gathered that here was a distinguished man of the world who—oh, yes—wrote some religious verse.

This of course is sad—not for the sake of Claudel (the reputation of genius, fortunately, does not depend on adequate obituaries in the daily press) but for the sake of our own culture's self-respect. And yet, it is understandable too. The significance of Paul Claudel was not of a kind to commend itself to our age. This strong-voiced man, who thundered affirmations for over half a century, was fated not to be heard by a generation whose ear is tuned mostly to questions and doubts. For this is an age of problems and Claudel, born out of due time, spoke answers.

André Gide once accused François Mauriac of having made a "reassuring compromise" in his novels which allowed him "to love God without losing sight of Mammon." Mauriac replied eloquently, but in the case of Claudel no such accusation could have been made in the first place—and here lies the probable reason why his art is not known in this country to any degree comparable to that of other great Christian writers—a Mauriac, a Greene, a Bernanos.

Claudel's ways were not labyrinthine but straight; he was more the prophet than the prober, more the judge than the consoler. His psychology seemed divorced from the existential demands of his (and our) milieu, rooted in an order transcending all milieux. This gave his works grandeur and universality, but it did not give what this age most often demands—an insight into its own despair. And so the tortured world of Franz Kafka is better known among us than the transfigured world of Paul Claudel. All of which is to say, not that Claudel failed us, but that we, in our temerity and our doubt, failed him.

A later age must finally assess Claudel's achievement as an artist. For the present it can only be discussed as it is discussed elsewhere in this issue of The Commonweal, with no unanimity of opinion. But there can be no doubt that he was one of the very great men of our time and of any time—a man who was mediocre in nothing, not even in his limitations. Can a more adequate tribute be paid him?

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GOING BY DEFAULT

ONE of the standard arguments against socialism is the indisputable fact that men tend to consider that "everybody's property is nobody's property." The fact that Americans hold what is publicly owned to be of little personal concern can be repeatedly verified on city streets and through highways, in public parks and public schools. Only extraordinary and continual "educational" campaigns against litter, fire and health hazards on the part of municipal and other authorities succeed in producing any widespread impact.

A comparable diffidence can be noted regarding even greater properties—the nation's vast natural resources. Except among the already persuaded it is possible to arouse about as much interest in conservation and publicly oriented administration of our vast national wealth and potential as it is in the socially constructive, but somehow inevitably prosaic, consumers cooperative movement. Except for certain scattered localities it does not appear possible to arouse people's interest in even what are alleged to be really big incursions against the public domain.

This is so, even when the matter of electric or atomic power and related issues constitutes the only major clear-cut difference between the Eisenhower administration and its predecessor. The fact, for instance, that Douglas McKay's Interior Department is now being openly charged with seeking—and following to the letter—the advice of Pacific Gas & Electric on changes in electric power regulations in such matters as private transmission lines on government land causes scarcely a flurry. The *Christian Science Monitor* claims much of the credit for bringing this charge to light, but the matter gets the scantiest notice even in the most comprehensive of our daily papers.

There is occasional passing mention of the current struggle in Congress to pass legislation that seeks to overturn last year's Supreme Court decision supporting price controls for natural gas to be sold in interstate commerce. The hamstringing of TVA and recurring attacks on REA, which succeeded in electrifying some eighty percent of the nation's farms in less than two decades, meet with little rejoinder.

Except locally, then, and notably in the Northwest, the Democrats seem unlikely to make much of their biggest difference with the Eisenhower Republicans. The power and resources question is, of course, somewhat muddied as a straight political issue by the fact that some Democrats such as the celebrated House majority leader, Mr. Samuel Rayburn, are in this matter squarely on the Republican side. The oil companies, the utilities companies, certain holding companies and large financial interests and others pull a tremendous amount of political weight—especially when the great public is so cheerily unconcerned over the progressive taking over of national resources by private interests.

Lack of an adequate force of lobbyists in Washington representing the interests of the consuming public has long been one of the greatest weaknesses of the working political system of the United States. Such a force was seldom more sorely needed than now when various bureau regulations are effecting changes that might not readily withstand the spotlight of full public debate preparatory to change by legislation. The fact that Secretary McKay has clamped down a virtual gag on his subordinates makes further disclosures about changes he has brought about through the Department of the Interior increasingly difficult. Present opposition to the "interests" appears lamentably weak.

PRESSURE NEEDED

LIBERALS often find themselves in a dilemma: they don't like State censorship but they don't like "pressure groups" either. And so, what to do about the problem, say, of pornographic books freely circulated in neighborhood drug stores? Usually they can think of nothing very effective to do, and are thus delivered into the hands of their critics who denounce them as muddleheaded accomplices in the corruption of the nation's youth.

This problem arises now over renewed demands in many localities for laws-with-teeth to control the flood of obscene material almost everywhere visible on newsstands. Liberals, as usual, are denouncing such laws. As usual, too, they are offering no adequate substitutes for them. And so, as usual, they are being denounced by those determined that something has got to be done.

And something will be done. This magazine is well known for its distrust of State censorship. We would wish to be equally known for our belief that the answer to such problems lies in action by local public opinion—in pressure brought to bear by the community on those who violate public decency. For pressure is a normal, necessary part of the democratic process while official censorship must be resorted to only when all else has failed. (Needless to say, we are speaking here of intelligent pressure, not of mere Philistinism.)

The *Indiana Catholic and Record* recognizes the seriousness of the problem and points out that the proper answer lies in action by the community

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—in the pressure of moral indignation. "Filthy literature in magazines, pocket-books and newspapers won't be done away with in this country by new laws, postal regulations, short-term drives and campaigns," the newspaper says. "It will be eliminated as a major problem only when the force of general public indignation is unloosed. . . " We agree. In a society such as ours the answer to violations of public decency rests with the conscience of the community, and in most of our cities it is long past the time when that conscience should be aroused.

JUST THE FIGURES

YOU would think that if a country had a depression, it would be no secret. But last year there was considerable debate as to whether the United States was or was not in an economic slump. As far as we can tell, if you answered in the affirmative, you were either a realist or a doom-and-disaster Democrat, depending, of course, on the politics of your audience. And if you answered in the negative, you were either a good Eisenhower Republican or a head-in-the-sand economic reactionary, again depending on the politics of your immediate environment.

Throughout much of the debate during 1954, there were not too many trustworthy figures on employment in general circulation. Recently, however, the Department of Commerce issued some statistics which may serve as something of a footnote to last year's arguments. In 1954, according to this report, civilian employment averaged 61,200,000. This figure was one million under the record high of 1953, but by the end of 1954 employment was back to the level of a year earlier. In considering this, it should also be noted that in 1954 the total labor force was about 500,000 greater than the average in 1953. Unemployment during 1954 averaged 3,200,000, or roughly five per cent of the civilian labor force. This figure was approximately double the record post war low of 1953, but at its peak unemployment in 1954 remained one million below the post war high of 4,700,000 in 1950. However, unemployed persons in 1954 were generally out of work longer than in 1953; in mid-1954 there were about 800,000 persons who had been out of work fifteen weeks or longer, compared with 150,000 to 200,000 a year earlier.

Those are the figures. We do not imagine for a minute that they will settle the argument. They might, however, provide an interesting base in fact from which each side can take off.

DEATH OF FATHER MAYDIEU

FRENCH Catholics, and all those who look to France for ideas and meaningful new applications of the Christian message in the light of contemporary problems, have sustained a severe loss in the recent death in Bordeaux of Father A. J. Maydieu, O.P. He was one of the heroes of the Resistance in World War II, was captured by the Nazis and imprisoned for many months. It was typical of this warm and unassumingly daring man that when a friend somehow managed to secure his release by bluffing the German prison authorities, he risked his new-won freedom and courted death by going back to the prison, and to his cell, to retrieve a manuscript he had written there.

Father Maydieu was the Editor of the vital and distinguished monthly, *La Vie Intellectuelle*. In recent years he had paid extended visits to the United States and other lands and had been seeking to arouse keener understanding between Catholics of various countries. He was greatly impressed by certain aspects of American Catholicism and especially desirous of making it sympathetically understood by his own beloved compatriots.

The following excerpts from an article "For the Unity of Catholics," which appeared over his signature in the April issue of *La Vie Intellectuelle*, give some intimation of the apostolic spirit that animated Father Maydieu: "It is possible to catch a glimpse of the burdensome but magnificent task that is imposed upon Christians of today. Familiar, too familiar, with their faith in so far as to what is extraordinary about it, they facilely tend to believe that they know the essence of their faith. Their object is too often to abstract from it some detail or non-essential or to communicate to others that which they believe they have adequately acquired in the catechism classes of their infancy or the religion classes of their youth. But throughout the course of their whole lives, confronted by the grandeur of a world whose dangers they must recognize even when it seems most propitious to them, they must discover the full meaning of faith in Jesus Christ. The grandeur and insufficiency of the world impose this urgent task on the Christian of today: to recognize, proclaim and affirm the Faith in all its fulness . . . the Christian must uphold faith in Christ and what is widely recognized as the contribution of Christianity to the world: the principle that every human being is of infinite worth. . ."

Father Maydieu's influence will live on in the important enterprises in which he played a leading part as well as among his disciples in many lands. May he rest in peace.

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Vocation of the Poet

"HE ANGUISHED OVER HOW HE WAS TO ADAPT HIMSELF TO GOD"

WALLACE FOWLIE

DESPITE the high praise of Charles Du Bos, who called him the greatest genius in the West of his day, and despite the judgment of Jacques Madaule, who compared him with Dante, Paul Claudel's place in literature and in Catholic thought is still vigorously disputed. In his middle eighties, at the time of his death, in February 1955, Claudel appeared as belligerent as ever, having maintained to the end not only his full powers as a writer but also his violent temper and his animosities. His detractors are still legion and his admirers come from many varying quarters, differing widely in their religious, political and aesthetic beliefs. Only since the second world war has there been a marked effort to understand him and to define his position in contemporary literature.

He was born in 1868, in Villeneuve-sur-Fère, a small village in the Tardenois, a locality which lies between the provinces of Ile-de-France and Champagne. Villeneuve today comprises about three hundred families. It lies in one of the rainiest sections of France. A strong wind blows there from the north almost constantly. For many years Claudel maintained contact with this village by spending his vacations there. He always remembered how difficult it was to walk against the wind, and how the church steeple, bent by it, resembled the mast of a schooner.

He received his schooling at the lycée Louis-le-Grand, in Paris. For the young Claudel it was a prison, the stifling atmosphere of which he has described in *Ma Conversion*. Camille Mauclair has recalled the sullen voice of Claudel at the lycée, and the silence he would break only to argue with their famous teacher Burdeau. At the graduation ceremonies of 1883 Renan made the principal address, one that has become famous, in which he told the students assembled before him, the day would come when one of them might denounce him as a poisoner, as a corruptor. This prediction was truer than Renan realized, because Claudel never ceased denouncing him.

In his last year at Louis-le-Grand, the year of philosophy, Claudel made friends with his classmates: Marcel Schwob, Léon Daudet, Chavannes, the future Sinologist. This was the time when, in company with other young intellectuals, he read Baudelaire and Verlaine. But the first great revelation to Claudel, of both a literary and spiritual order, was to be Rimbaud. He has described in a passage justly famous and justly disputed the profound effect which the reading of *Les Illuminations* had on him. He first came upon some of the prose poems in the June issue of *La Vogue* of 1886. To him it meant release from what he called the hideous world of Taine, Renan and the other Molochs of the nineteenth century. "J'avais la révélation du surnaturel," he wrote to Jacques Rivière.

Rimbaud was the vehicle of Claudel's return to his faith. Certain sentences of *Une Saison en Enfer,* such as "Nous ne sommes pas au monde," never ceased to impress him by clarifying for him the real significance of his own revolt. For, not unlike Rimbaud himself, Claudel was a revolutionary, a Dionysian ecstatic. Such prose poems as Rimbaud's *Après le déluge* and *Enfances* affected the rigid philosophical system which Claudel believed his. They taught him something concerning the mysterious character of poetic inspiration preceding personal experiences which were to come later, but which were secretly related to it.

CLAUDEL has recorded that in the same year, 1886, on Christmas day in Notre-Dame, during the singing of vespers, he experienced a spiritual awakening, a revelation of faith which was never to be impaired or endangered thereafter.

This mystical experience was followed by four years of bewilderment and struggle to harmonize the new force in him with his former self. He began to study the Bible, the history of the Church and its liturgy, and discovered that what he had once valued as poetry, was indissolubly associated with religion. He attended Mallarmé's Tuesday evening gatherings and learned from the master and teacher of symbolism to look at the universe as if it were a text to be deciphered.

Mr. Fowlie is the author of *Rimbaud, Clowns and Angels,* and other studies of modern literature.

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At the age of twenty-five, Claudel left for Boston to serve there as vice-consul for France. This marked the beginning of a long diplomatic career which took him to many parts of the world. In China, where he went in 1895, he entered upon a period of solitude, silence and meditation. His *Vers d'Exil* echo something of the spiritual experience of the five years in China. *Connaissance de l'Est* is a form of intimate journal accompanying the poems. One of the poems in *Connaissance de l'Est* speaks of his return to Paris, just before leaving for China, when he realized he was unknown in his own country. It constitutes his farewell to his family, his past, his country. He was free and disengaged, ready for the unknown.

The physical voyage had its counterpart in a spiritual voyage, comparable to Rimbaud's. Claudel felt no doubts concerning his faith. But the demands of the future, of what he was to become in the future, were gigantic. He did not doubt the existence of God, but he anguished over how he was to adapt himself to God. He had not become a Catholic in order to enjoy religious experience, but through a sense of obedience, in order to discover what was demanded of him as a man. His vocation as a Christian was still obscure to him, and he felt himself at the beginning of a diplomatic career, of a writer's career and of a religious career. All three seemed interrelated, but he was not yet clear as to what was being asked of him.

At Shanghai his consular function occupied all of his time after daily Mass and an hour spent on his own writing. He had more freedom at Foochow and Hankow. From these centers he took excursions and observed the landscapes which he recaptured on the pages of *Connaissance de l'Est*. Unlike Mallarmé in his career as teacher, Claudel, who had a highly developed sense of obligation, derived pleasure and satisfaction from his diplomatic and administrative duties. Everything in China interested him: the optimism and good humor of the people, their simplicity and sense of comradeship, their politeness, their art and their theater.

His studies in China centered on the Bible and St. Thomas Aquinas. Not until the recent book of Ernest Friche, *Etudes Claudéliennes,* has the predominant influence of St. Thomas been pointed out. Friche calls Claudel a Thomistic poet. In an important letter, Claudel himself confirmed this influence: "I read and annotated the two *Summas*," he wrote. "It was a wonderful nourishment and training for my mind. Those lessons transformed me and merged with all my creative activity."

To Rimbaud's doctrine on the power of poetic language, and to Mallarmé's doctrine on the symbolism of the universe, Claudel added the gigantic synthesis of St. Thomas and the religious interpretation of metaphorical language. At the end of the century, when Claudel returned to France from China, he was practicing the metaphysical discipline he had acquired from Aquinas without, however, abandoning what he had learned from Rimbaud and Mallarmé.

In September 1900 Claudel entered the Abbey of Ligugé in order to test his religious vocation. He was still undecided about the focus of his life. If he discovered in himself the vocation of a religious, he was ready to give up art and literature. At the monastery of Ligugé, he became an oblate of the Benedictine Order, but was discouraged by his superiors from continuing with a religious vocation. He has described how, in his life of prayer at that time, he received a very definite refusal, a *no* which came to him in a semi-mystical way. In his poem, "Sainte Thérèse," Claudel describes the religious vocation in which the will of God is substituted for man's will. A priest is not necessarily prevented from writing poems, but poetry cannot be the principal goal of his life. In his career of diplomat, Claudel was not called upon to make the sacrifice of himself which the priestly or poetic vocation would demand. In the deepest sense, for Claudel, there is incompatibility between the priesthood and the poet's calling. For him the debate was settled in 1900.

As ambassador, Claudel represented France in Tokyo, Washington and Brussels. His diplomatic career, which has included posts in Prague, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Rio-de-Janeiro, kept him away from France and literary groups. His travels helped to make him into one of the most universal of French writers. The scope of his interests and studies was unusual for a French poet: Chinese theatre, Italian and Dutch painting, Japanese poetry, Spanish culture, and English Catholic literature, some of which he has translated. The later years of his life were spent in Brangues.

BETWEEN the years spent in China at the end of the century and the performance of *L'Annonce faite à Marie* in 1912, not much public attention was focused on Claudel, and even from his friends on the *Nouvelle Revue Française,* which published his work from 1909 on, he heard very little. Their admiration was silent. Gide and Rivière both had marked admiration for him, but failed to express it at that time. A few critics, Souday and Pierre Lasserre especially, attacked him. Even later in his career, he suffered from the silence of the critics and the public. *Le Soulier de Satin* was scarcely noticed when it was first published. Not a single notice or review of *Corona Benignitatis Anni Dei* appeared. And in recent years, this neglect is still somewhat true of the books of Biblical exegesis. Now, in the year of his death, he is a great figure, but an ill-known figure.

As a writer, Claudel never made concessions to his public. The Catholic world in France and outside

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of France has been slow to accept him. When he presented his candidacy for the *Académie Française* just before the war, he failed to win the election. Not until after the war, in 1947, was he invited to become a member of the group. His attitude toward the world of letters, and even toward the world in general, has seemed hostile and almost vindictive. His implacable seriousness discouraged any sense of humor. He had the temperament of a stubborn peasant, comparable in this respect to Péguy.

And yet Paul Claudel participated gladly in every aspect of the Catholic revival in France: in art, philosophy and liturgy. By virtue of his strength, his consistent seriousness, and the proportions of his work, he towered above his contemporaries. As he remained outside all literary coteries, his presence was yet felt by its sheer spiritual weight. Like every Christian, he was simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic. Goodness can be achieved in this world, but only through suffering. Fundamentally, Claudel did not believe in the temporal triumph of the Church. Persecution, he reminded us, is one of the promises of Christ. He appears today as a patriarch contemplating our planet in its evil and chaos.

Always guided by his Catholicism, he created and re-created, interpreted and modified an endless number of myths and ideas. Man was for him at all times equally flesh and spirit, expressing in his duality the mystery of the Incarnation. Men in all parts of the world, in the remotest districts and in the metropolitan centers, are all sharing in the same existence and experiencing the drama of an identical destiny.

Never contaminated by the Jansenism of his period, which has weakened so much contemporary Catholic literature, Claudel was always free from prudery. He opened himself to the universe ("consentir à l'univers") in what he called a marriage with the universe in the heart of Christ. The cross is the meeting-place between God and His creation, for in the cross the creation participated in all suffering and all exaltation.

In his acceptance of the world, which was not pantheistic but the expression of his striving for unity, Claudel remained always a dedicated son of the Church. Without reservations or explanations, he never missed an opportunity to declare the faith which far from being an aesthetic, or, for that matter, any other sort of "attitude," represented for him the one truth. For scholarship, the notebook, the case history furnish, according to him, a very small amount of knowledge about man, by comparison with what the mystics have bequeathed us.

Taken as a whole, Paul Claudel's work is praise to God and praise to His creation. It does not reflect the exaltation of a mystic but it is rather the expression of the natural joy of a man who has found an order in the universe and believes in a certain relationship between this world and the next. In whatever he wrote—poems, letters, plays, essays, Biblical exegesis —he steadfastly explored the central drama: the human soul engaged in its adventure with eternity.

CLAUDEL: MUSICIAN-DRAMATIST

The Universal Artist

"HE WAS LIKE A VOLCANO OF CREATIVITY, BELCHING FORTH MASTERPIECES"

J. P. MANSHIP

PAUL Claudel was a universal man, like the great men of the Renaissance, and with his death the universe seems to have shrunk. His spirit roved over the whole world, for Claudel's was an imperialistic, almost a cannibalistic, genius. Like Simon Agnel in his early play *Tête d'Or,* he set out to conquer the world, and not only the physical world, but the larger range of the spiritual one: from politics and economics to the arts, to philosophy and theology, to the deeper levels of the soul; he wandered everywhere, and to understand his breadth, we must not limit our view to those arts that he practiced professionally.

Music, for example. A few years ago Joseph Samson, the conductor of the choir of the cathedral of Dijon, published a book called *Claudel—Poète Musicien,* and in the preface, Claudel asked, if he could be called a musician, why not an architect and a great many other things. The idea seemed rather to please him; it is to be regretted that it wasn't pursued.

That charming person, *Dona Musica,* is a symbol of the role of music in his work. She is the *anima* of *Le Soulier de Satin,* and music likewise is a sort of *anima* to the *animus* of language: a sounding board

Mr. Manship, a painter and writer now residing in New York, formerly lived in Paris.

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against which words and thoughts are played. It is for Claudel the soul of art. There is a close parallel between music in his thoughts and water, which is an ever-recurring symbol in his poetry. That liquid element is the medium *par excellence*, of travel and trade, but also of refreshment and of grace. This conception of music is at the heart of his drama, and if some of his plays became operas—*Le livre de Christophe Colomb* and *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* specifically—music is absent from none of them. Claudel was, in fact, so much of a musician, that the composer's role in these collaborations, Honegger has written, was the menial one of realizing his ideas.

To understand the origin of Claudel's idea of the drama, we must recognize the great influence that Wagner had upon him. Now that the famous music-dramas are altogether too familiar and too closely linked for us with shoddy and absurd performances, we may find it hard to realize what Wagner meant to his own times. Rolland has written that when Wagner died, Europe, to him, seemed to have lost its soul. Wagner was a sort of incarnation of the arts: a triumphant Bohemian, but also a prophet, a leader. We undervalue him when we consider him as a musician alone or as a dramatist. He revived, in the age of Scribe and Dumas *fils* and Dion Boucicault, at least the ideal of the Greek drama. I am convinced that it was from him, even more than from Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Mallarmé's *Herodiade* (themselves deeply influenced by Wagner, too), that came the seed of Claudel's theater.

IT is curious that the critics of Claudel haven't—to my knowledge—dwelt much on this debt. Perhaps it is that, as men of letters, they are incapable of seeing beyond that compartment. Perhaps it is too obvious an influence and, as such, one that is easily overlooked. In the case of the Frenchmen it may be due to an instinctive dislike of anyone as blatantly German as Wagner. Nor should we forget that Claudel himself has thrown dust in our eyes, by his many disparaging remarks concerning Wagner in his later essays.

But in the very number of these remarks, we have strong evidence of the facts. And the facts are that in Wagner he found a drama that was uncompromising to the weakness and frivolity of the audience; one that was richly poetic and that sprang entirely from the imagination: one in which the deepest of human passions could be treated nakedly. From Wagner came that practical sense of the theater that has made his work capable of performance—popular even—and which he could never have learned from the poetic plays of the symbolists. From Wagner too came his major faults: an incorrigible lyricism and verbosity.

The subject of *Tannhaeuser* is basically the same as that of *le Soulier de Satin* or *le Partage de Midi*: that of salvation through love, but how simple-minded Wagner seems as compared to Claudel! Tannhaeuser is a man addicted to *delectatio morosa*, who is saved by the love of a pure woman; but the mechanism of this is not at all clear, and, inartistically, Wagner depends too much on the miraculous. Mesa on the other hand is not a sensual but a proud man, whose heart is opened by his love for a sensual woman. The course of this love is clear, nor is there any trickery with grace, for Claudel perceived that Providence is in the very fabric of our passions and our sorrows.

This play follows closely the lines of *Tristan und Isolde*: in its structure (the first act on board ship, the love-duet in the second act, the *liebestod* in the third), even in the name of its heroine—Yse. But Claudel's play is richer in its symbolism than Wagner's. The latter strikes the notes of love and death: in the orgasm (what is the *liebestod* but a musical orgasm?) he sees a communion with death. But Claudel has torn from his heart—*Le Partage de Midi* is the result of a period of anguish and despair in his own life—a knowledge that is deeper than this—or perhaps it is only the hope—that love, no matter how impure, has a role in God's Providence. This insight—beyond the Manichaean German master—is elaborated, in *le Soulier de Satin,* into the skeleton of a new "Divine Comedy."

Claudel himself complained that Wagner dipped the whole of his work, indiscriminately, into his musical bath. He himself used music as an element in his drama with greater care. For music is a symbol of grace. The work becomes more musical with the development of grace, as in *le Soulier de Satin,* of which the last day is a pure lyric. In *le Pain dur*, from which grace is absent, music is as well: the horror of the play is intensified by the bareness of its prose. In his work with Milhaud, Claudel sought to trace the growth of music from speech and rhythm. In all of this he drew closer to the practice of the Greeks, for whom music was a subordinate element in the whole drama, and not as in Wagner an imperious one; but we must not forget that it was Wagner who fired him with the Greek ideal.

One of the happiest of Claudel's formal devices is the interior dialogue. In this form is that great masterpiece, the *Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher,* which deals so genially with the gravest questions. In several of his smaller dialogues he debated Wagner with himself: at length in *Richard Wagner*, briefly in *Aegri Somnia.* In the latter the name of the great German was raised only to be rejected: no, he said, he had gone beyond Wagner and wanted now to speak of Rubens. "I have only to hear the name of Rubens to be joyful."

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Claudel was, I think, one of the greatest art critics of his time. Like Valéry, he was in the succession of Baudelaire, the great poet-critic of the last century. It was his triumph that despite his background in the Gothic revival, despite his Catholicism, which might have induced in him a sentimental medievalism, he could see the towering genius of the great painters of the Renaissance and of the Baroque. At a time when it was unfashionable to like Rubens or the Dutch school, Claudel wrote of them with perception and vast enthusiasm. Likewise he dared to prefer Velasquez to El Greco. The fact is that a master such as Rubens (or Titian or Tintoretto—to whom François Fosca likens Claudel) achieved in his work very much the synthesis of Claudel's own spirit. He saw the world, in all its splendid richness and variety, as a creation and his art as an offering. There is nothing morbid in Rubens' sensuality but only a sort of supernatural geniality. This too is the mark of Claudel's genius.

As an art-critic, Claudel admired a great range of work: from that of the Orient, to that of the Middle Ages, to that of the Renaissance; but he was no eclectic. The prestige of novelty did not dislodge him from the rock of his principles. He had no sympathy with purely technical exercises, nor with that narrowing of the range of art which is the meaning of abstraction, nor with the obscene commercialism of the nineteenth century academy either. The modern painter that most nearly satisfied him was José Maria Sert.

Sert is not now as well known as he deserves to be. He was the most skillful painter of his time, and gifted with a most abundant imagination. He had a theologian's mind and was especially remarkable in his handling of his subjects: he was original, witty, and profound. He was furthermore the only man of our times who has successfully painted for churches.

With Claudel as godfather, Sert was the father of what might be termed the "Baroque revival," if that name doesn't suggest an archeological concern. He had thus a considerable influence on art history and the art business, but that is of no importance. What is important is that he tried to prolong the high tradition of our painting, that which we associate with the names of Titian, Rubens, Tiepolo, Delacroix, into the anarchy of this century. Now that abstraction seems to have run its course and to have been sucked dry by its own inventors, perhaps other, younger painters will join in this task. *L'Oeil Ecoute* is a book that might well fire a generation of artists.

It was to Sert that *le Soulier de Satin* was dedicated, and Sert decorated a special edition of the play. The Spain it paints is his: "The whole pact of Spain with God, the whole Spanish scene, the complete way in which Spain is able to translate the successive moments of the Revolution and the Redemption and the drama of our salvation is developed there in a golden wave, not so much in immobility as in an equilibrium of forces." In this passage Claudel is speaking of Sert's work in the cathedral of Vich, but he might as well be speaking of his own play.

Le Soulier de Satin is, I think, the greatest work for the stage since Goethe's *Faust*. Claudel would not have liked this comparison, although perhaps only for the trivial reason that Goethe was a great favorite of Gide's, but there is a great similarity between the two poets and between them and Hugo. They are artists of a vast range—poets, dramatists, critics, philosophers. If Claudel never attempted the novel, neither of the others ever wrote a philosophical treatise like *l'Art Poètique*, nor anything like Claudel's Biblical exegesis. They were all men of vast energy, in love as well as art. Gide compared Claudel to a pile-driver and said that he found him exhausting. In this connection I shall always retain the image of Claudel as I often saw him, at the High Mass in Notre-Dame, determinedly charging to the Communion rail from that column where he had been converted as a boy and where he generally assisted at Mass, pushing others out his way that he might be first to the Host. All three were active in politics—although Claudel was the only professional among them; all of them, octogenarians, became at the end of their lives those embodiments of the national genius that we call "grand old men." The elaborate ceremonies of Claudel's state funeral rivaled even those of Victor Hugo.

It is, I think, important to speak of Claudel in this company. His small reputation in America is due to a large extent to the successful efforts of our Catholics to persuade their countrymen that he is a worthless writer of devotional verse. There is, for example, a study by Katherine Bregy, in which Claudel finds himself, like a bull in a china shop, in an edifying group consisting of Joyce Kilmer, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, Louise Imogene Guiney, and Father Tabb. But if we must save him from such mediocrities, we must not for all that forget his Catholicism.

Of all the great artists with whom I have compared him, the one he is most like is, I think, Rubens. He was a modern Rubens, although a poet rather than a painter. He was a diplomat and man of the world, a family man and a Christian, robust and sensual, but, unlike Rubens, he lived in a time that seemed to contradict both his faith and his geniality. He did his work nonetheless—how could he not have?—for he was like a volcano of creativity, belching forth masterpieces, flowing over all other fields, warming his time with the heat of his passion and lighting it with his vision.

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The Intolerance of Genius

"HE WAS DETERMINED, IN SPITE OF OURSELVES, TO DRAG US AWAY FROM DOUBT AND DILETTANTISM"

MARTIN TURNELL

THERE are certain French poets who present a special problem for Anglo-Saxon readers. Corneille and Racine are the most celebrated, but we meet the same problem in Hugo and Claudel. It is the problem of language. It is not that the French they wrote is particularly difficult; it is the difficulty of accustoming ourselves to poetry which is very unlike English poetry, to poetry which seems abstract, rhetorical, declamatory. Racine now has a small band of devoted admirers and hostility to Corneille is diminishing, but it has taken over two hundred years. It is possible that the same thing may happen with Claudel whose poetic drama has aroused little enthusiasm in England or America.

In the case of Claudel the problem of language is complicated by the personality of the man which pervades every line he wrote. There can be no doubt that he was the most formidable personality in the European literature of the first half of the twentieth century. It is from this fact that any attempt to assess his significance must start: "I am not a *bel esprit,*" he once said in a letter to Jacques Rivière; "I am a simple, serious man. As an artist, I despise virtuosi, and I do not understand practical jokers. The sneer, from Voltaire to Anatole France, has always seemed to me to be the sign of the damned. As soon as a man is possessed by the hatred of God, he is unable to prevent himself from laughing." The simplicity, the solemnity and the intolerance of these sentences bring home to us the rugged power of the man which left its impress on his contemporaries.

"It is no good thinking that we can bring to Claudel a cold admiration!" said Rivière in a youthful essay on his poetry. "It is not our taste that he cares about pleasing; he demands our soul so that he can offer it to God. He wants to force our innermost consent. He is determined, in spite of ourselves, to drag us away from doubt and dilettantism."

It was this determination to impose himself, to force peoples' "innermost consent," which produced the drama of his relations with André Gide. "As a young man," Gide wrote in his diary in 1905, "Claudel looked like a nail; now he looks like a sledge-hammer. Not a very high forehead, but rather wide; face without subtlety as if carved with a chisel; bull neck continued by the straight line of the head, through which passion can rush and flood the brain . . . He gives me the impression of a solidified cyclone. When he talks, it is as if something were released inside him; he proceeds by sudden affirmations, and maintains a hostile tone even when you share his opinion."

Another entry made twenty years later shows that time had not weakened the impression: "In the presence of Claudel, I am aware of what I lack; he dominates me; he weighs on me; he has more base and surface, more health, money, genius, power, children, faith etc., than I have. I only think of piping down."

The correspondence between Claudel and Gide was much more than an exchange between two famous writers; it was a dialogue between the two poles of the French intelligence; a clash between the mobile skeptical mind of Montaigne and Pascal, and the earthy, conservative, orthodox mind. Certain phrases stand out—phrases which throw considerable light on this particular representative of the Christian tradition—"sledge-hammer," "petrified cyclone," "dominates me." For the granite-like faith, which was so different from the restless questioning of a Mauriac or a Greene, the power and fanaticism of the man dominated everybody who came into contact with him, forced their respect even when they withheld their "innermost consent."

I HAVE used the word "intolerance." It is inescapable in discussing Claudel. His intolerance frightened his opponents, but it was the main cause of his failure as an apologist when dealing with men like Gide. It also led to astonishing errors in his judgments of writers.

Claudel's hostility to the writers of the Enlightenment is understandable. He lived through the worst days of the spoliation of the Church in France at

Mr. Turnell, a frequent contributor to The Commonweal, is the author of *Baudelaire* and *The Novel in France.*

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the hands of the anti-clericals, whom he regarded as the heirs of Voltaire and Diderot; but it did not stop there. He refused to allow any virtue to writers who were known to have held anti-clerical views or whose good faith he suspected.

When a literary journal invited him in common with other men of letters to send a message for the tercentenary of Descartes' *Discourse on Method,* he replied tartly that he had re-read the book and could see nothing in it. He hated Stendhal; he had no use for Flaubert, and Zola was "that disgusting Zola." He admired Gide's work with reservations while he thought there was a chance of making an important convert, but as soon as the fish slipped through the net Claudel discovered that his books were worthless. "From the artistic and intellectual point of view," he said in a notorious interview in 1947, "Gide is nothing."

"I know that we are fair only to people we love," Claudel remarked at the end of one of his diatribes. There was usually something in what he said, but he went too far in his denunciation of famous unbelievers as he went too far in his indulgence for minor performers whose orthodoxy was beyond doubt. Coventry Patmore emerged as a great religious poet, and it was thanks to Claudel's enthusiasm that G. K. Chesterton made a surprising and somewhat incongruous appearance in the pages of the *Nouvelle Revue Française.*

Although Claudel's letters contain violent attacks on apostates like Renan, whom he considered responsible for his own youthful infidelity, there was another, a gentler and a much more engaging side to the Christian. The brief autobiographical essay called *Ma Conversion* has always seemed to me to be one of the most moving as well as one of the most impressive of his writings. After describing the state of despair in which he was living, he tells of his visit as a young man of eighteen to Notre-Dame in Paris on the evening of Christmas Day, 1886:

"I myself was standing in the crowd near the second pillar at the entrance to the choir on the right of the sacristy. It was then that the event took place which revolutionized my whole life. Suddenly, my heart was touched and I BELIEVED. I believed with such strength, with the power of my whole being, with a conviction which was so overwhelming and a certainty which shut out so completely the tiniest particle of doubt, that nothing since—neither books nor reasoning nor the vicissitudes of an extremely varied life—has been able to shake or even to touch my faith. I was overcome with a sudden and overwhelming sense of the innocence and the eternal infancy of God—an inexpressible revelation."

The sequel to this experience was remarkable. In spite of the overwhelming certainty, it took Claudel four long and painful years to work his passage back to the Church:

"For my philosophical opinions remained intact. God had contemptuously left them where they were. I could see nothing to change. The Catholic religion still seemed to me to be the same treasure-house of absurd fairy stories. Its priests and its faithful filled me with exactly the same aversion as before—an aversion which was not far from disgust. The fabric of my opinions and knowledge remained standing, and I could not see the slightest fault in it. And yet I had found a way out. A new person, making the most terrifying demands on the young man and the artist that I was, had revealed himself and refused to be reconciled with any of the things that surrounded me."

When he reached home he began to read a German Protestant Bible, the only copy of the Bible at hand. "The story of Christ," he continues, "was known to me only from Renan's *Life of Jesus,* and thanks to this impostor, I did not even know that Christ had ever claimed to be the Son of God. Every word and every line contradicted, with its majestic simplicity, the impudent assertions of the impostor and helped to open my eyes."

Ma Conversion was not written and published until 1907. What is interesting in the last passage is the switch from experience to savage comment on the "impostor," the emergence of the militant Catholic into which the eighteen-year-old convert had grown.

WHILE Claudel's letters and essays may outlast his poetry, it is on his poetic dramas and on the poems contained in the *Five Great Odes* or the *Cantata for Three Voices* that his reputation as a writer at present rests. There is a passage in his essay on Dante in *Positions et Propositions* which helps us to understand his own aims:

"The object of poetry," he wrote, "is not, as people often make out, dreams, illusions and ideas. It is that holy reality which was created once for all, and in which we ourselves are placed. It is the universe of visible things to which faith joins that of invisible things. . . . All of it is the work of God Who creates the stuff of the greatest poet and of the humblest bird. And just as the *philosophia perennis* does not invent, as great novelists who had mistaken their vocations like Spinoza and Leibnitz invented, abstract beings which no one had seen before their inventors, but is content with the terms provided by reality . . . so there is a *poesis perennis* which does not invent its themes, but takes what creation offers in the manner of the liturgy."

Claudel set out to write a *poesis perennis*—a poetry dealing with eternal themes in the created world. In his plays he chooses a critical moment in the spiritual evolution of mankind, but his procedure is the reverse of Eliot's. The setting is not a country house or a

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cocktail party. It is always far removed from contemporary civilization either in time or space. It is medieval France or Renaissance Europe, the Napoleonic era or the time of the Vatican Council, the Caucasus or China, or—most characteristic of all—a ship in mid-ocean.

The theme of the principal plays is the fortunes of the human couple in love. Claudel's conception of love clearly owes something to the "fatal passion" of the Tristan legend, but the handling is Christian. His lovers are "predestined" for one another, but they are always separated by an obstacle which may be either moral, psychological or physical. Ysé and Prouhèze have married "the wrong man"; Sygne de Coûfontaine gives up her cousin and marries the appalling Turelure in order to save the Pope; Violaine contracts leprosy. Violaine and Sygne are saintly figures, but with Ysé and Mesa, Prouhèze and Rodrigue, love becomes in fact or intention adulterous. This is in keeping with the Tristan legend, but Claudel's aim is to show that good may come through sin, or that sin may be the means of finding God.

Love in Claudel, as surely as in the legend, is of its nature unhappy; but there is one serious flaw in the plays which has disturbed even Catholic critics. We have the impression that the lovers are unhappy in their love because God intends them to be unhappy, that God is engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with his creatures, dashing the cup from their lips at the very moment when the obstacles to happiness and a Christian life have been removed. There is something repellent about the arguments of the priest who persuades Sygne to sacrifice herself and abandon her widowed cousin; and though Ysé's husband is dead, the curtain falls "with a crash of thunder" as the house in which she and Mesa are hiding is blown to pieces. Whether they are saints or sinners, violent death following violent passion is the fate of nearly all these people. It is impossible to avoid the feeling not merely that Claudel's God has more in common with the tribal god of the Old Testament than with the Christian God of the New, but that He resembles the poet himself in one of his harsher moods.

CLAUDEL described *Le Soulier de Satin* as a résumé of all his work. It is regarded by many of his critics as his most important play, and it is certainly his most ambitious. It is part poetic drama and part farce, part morality play and part fantasy. It opens in sixteenth-century Spain, but the setting expands to embrace Europe, Africa, America, the East, the whole world. It is one of the most striking productions of our time, but if it exemplifies Claudel's characteristic virtues, it also exemplifies his most serious weaknesses. There is little genuine dramatic tension; the characters are abstractions engaged in propagating the poet's ideas; and the exaggerated symbolism gives it an air of unreality. The source of these weaknesses is to be found in some words spoken by the hero: "It is not in order to become in my turn silence and immobility that I have broken a continent in two and crossed two seas. It is because I am a Catholic; it is in order that every part of humanity may be reunited."

The plain fact is that it is much more a work of propaganda than a work of art. Claudel tried to create a Catholic world-conquerer, and to show him adding continents to the Church, but his eloquence could not breathe life into this phantom and the parallel between Rodrigue, who is stripped of his honors and sold as a slave, and Our Lord seems frankly grotesque.

In *Ma Conversion* Claudel pays tribute to the importance of the part played by Rimbaud in his spiritual development, but Rimbaud was also one of the major influences in his literary development. Claudel has explained his verse technique in a long essay in *Positions et Propositions*. This is not the place to discuss in detail the complicated theory of stresses and pauses, or the importance of the arrangement of words on the printed page. It is sufficient to say that Claudel introduced a personal form of free verse. His own word is *verset* which is the French word for a verse of the Bible. His verse was formed by a study of the Bible, the liturgy, the prose poetry of Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*, Rimbaud's *Illuminations* and, to a lesser extent, Whitman's free verse. His aim was flexibility and suppleness; he wanted to produce an instrument which though capable of the dignity and eloquence proper to poetry, remained close to the spoken word and was therefore suitable for drama.

Hail then, O world new to my eyes, O world that
    is now total!
O creed entire of visible and invisible things,
    I accept you with a catholic heart!
Whichever way I turn my head
I behold the immense octave of Creation!
The world open and, however wide the span,
    my eye traverses it from end to end.
I have weighed the sun like a fat sheep that two
    strong men suspend on a pole between their
    shoulders.

THIS passage from the second of the *Five Great Odes* is a fair illustration of the strength and weakness of Claudel's poetry. We can hardly fail to be impressed by the loftiness of the voice, the marked liturgical movement, or the grandeur of the vision with its emphasis on words like "total," "entire," "span" and "octave of Creation," its conception of the hierarchy of being from God down to the "fat sheep." Once again,

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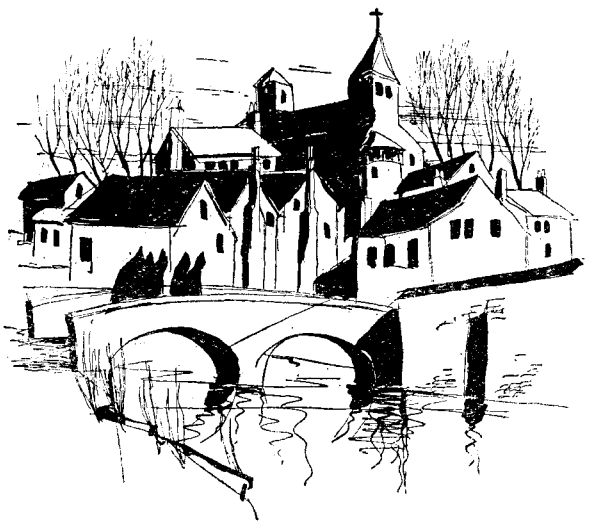
however, the crucial word is the word "catholic." Claudel clearly intends it in the double sense of "Christian" and "universal," but his poetry is always at the service of religion and for me "catholic" in its present context is a word of limitation. Claudel does not forge new concepts out of theological terms as Eliot does in the *Four Quartets*—indeed, his theory of poetry plainly excludes anything of the sort—he uses them as a means of appealing to the beliefs of his readers in a manner which is both different from and less impressive than Eliot's. This is symptomatic of all his work. It means that his poetry is not creative in the full sense, that it does not possess either the intensity or the precision of the greatest poetry.

I think we must go on to conclude that what was really wrong with Claudel was a curious defect of intelligence. He was, as his fanaticism shows only too clearly, a man in whom powerful emotions were not matched by a correspondingly powerful intelligence. He did not possess the kind of intelligence—the intelligence that we find in a high degree in Eliot—which enables a writer to re-think traditional concepts, to sift and test his experience, and finally to introduce a fresh pattern which alters our ways of thinking and feeling.

"I like him and want him thus, scolding the easy luke-warm Catholics who try to compromise," wrote Gide in 1931. "We can admit him, admire him: he owes it to himself to vomit us." This entry from Gide's diary provides in a way a fitting epitaph. Claudel was a unique figure. There was no one remotely resembling him in contemporary literature, and it is difficult to think of anyone like him in the past. We are bound to admire the man and the grand design of his work, the uncompromising Christian whose faith was a constant reproach to the wayward, the laggards and the fainthearted. Yet in the last resort he seems to me to have been a great figure and a great Christian rather than a great writer. I do not think that he would have quarreled with this verdict.



THE SCREEN

SEPTEMBER AND MAY

HAVING made several movies recently about romances between middle-aged men and young girls, Hollywood would of course dig up the grandpappy of them all: "Daddy Long Legs." This rather sweet and sentimental tear-jerker first appeared as a novel by Jean Webster in 1912, and then as a play with Ruth Chatterton, and twice as a movie. Now it's a musical—modernized with the full treatment: CinemaScope, some lovely De Luxe Color and wonderfully imaginative ballets by Roland Petit. Surprisingly enough, in spite of the up-dating it's still sweet and sentimental—thanks to the nice, light direction of Jean Negulesco, the bright script by Phoebe and Harry Ephron, the catchy music of Johnny Mercer and the perfect casting of Fred Astaire and Leslie Caron in the lead roles.

Fred plays the very wealthy, middle-aged American like a very wealthy, middle-aged American who's still nimble on his feet, handy with the drums and enjoys making and spending his millions. As the French orphan, sponsored by Fred at a New England college when the ambassador refuses to let him adopt the eighteen-year-old girl, Leslie displays all the charm and *joie de vivre* that won everyone who saw "Lili." The girl's not pretty, but she knows how to walk and talk and dance; and she's a delight to watch in every scene. My only objection to "Daddy Long Legs" is that it's too long, but I wouldn't cut out any of the humorous repartee between Thelma Ritter and Fred Clark, or any of the touching scenes between Astaire and Caron, or that lively "Sluefoot" number in which the dancing Astaire shows up the younger set. I guess "Daddy Long Legs" better be left as is: it's going to please nice, soft-hearted people of all ages and maybe a few ogres too.

I'M not sure exactly for whom "The Prodigal" was made. The picture expands the Prodigal Son parable into a lengthy spectacle enhanced by CinemaScope and Eastman Color that is often quite beautiful. As might be expected it emphasizes the incidents in Damascus where the young man wastes his substance and where dancing girls and Lana Turner, as the high priestess of Astarte, carry on in a style that was well established by Griffith and De Mille in the early days of cinema. In the title role, Edmund Purdom gives his best performance to date, handsomely bearded at first in the manner of his Jewish fathers and then smooth-shaven after he falls for Lana, whose price is the pearl that Solomon gave Sheba. So enraptured

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is this young man with the blonde beauty that he mortgages practically everything, but he fails to read the fine type and he falls into the clutches of Louis Calhern and Francis L. Sullivan who make him a slave. Before he gets back to father and the ending of the story as given in the New Testament, he leads a revolt so full of violence and gore that it is almost impossible to watch.

"The Prodigal" is neither for children nor for the squeamish, and, in spite of Charles Schnee's elaborate production, the good script written by Maurice Zimm and the direction of Richard Thorpe, who managed to make his people real amidst all the spectacle, it fails as a movie. All of which is too bad.

EVER since "High Noon" and "Shane," Hollywood has been trying to come up with another western or outdoor-type movie that has an honest thought integrated into the action. The only film that has reached the high level of its predecessors so far this year is "Bad Day at Black Rock." Latest contender in the field is "Run for Cover" which doesn't make the grade, but still manages to tell an interesting and exciting story in the western genre. After the folk in this particular western town realize their mistake in almost lynching James Cagney and young John Derek, they try to compensate by making Cagney sheriff. Cagney accepts but has to work overtime to straighten out the embittered young man who was crippled by the townsfolk. Director Nicholas Ray tells the story of Cagney's failure in effective cinema and he handles the leads, including Viveca Lindfors, and supporting cast well. Although the script unfortunately drags in a divorce situation that muddies up the story and has no relevancy to the main points, the picture puts over the main theme with a solid punch: you can't always run for cover—sometimes you've got to stop and fight, if it comes to that, and even pick up the pieces.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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COMMUNICATIONS

"McCARTHYISM REVISITED"

Cambridge, Mass.

TO the Editors: My congratulations to John Cogley for his fine, perceptive article, "McCarthyism Revisited" [May 13, 1955]. There is, however, a point which was perhaps implicit in his reasoning, but which I believe deserves explicit elaboration. Mr. Cogley lucidly points out that democracy will always contain the element of danger; what he neglected was the important corollary that such risks must be minimized if democracy is to survive.

On the one hand, to guard against those who would subvert our freedom by taking advantage of its laxities, there must be clearly delineated limits outside of which liberty becomes license. Sensitive government positions must be protected against infiltration by agents of international conspiracies. Universities must learn to distinguish between the honest radical and those who have abandoned the free pursuit of knowledge. Free enterprise and the free labor movement must be kept responsible to the general community.

By the same token, future manifestations of mccarthyism can be guarded against within our present institutional framework. Congressional committees must be denied the power to prosecute individuals before "the Great American Jury." While the tripartite structure of our government requires Congress to keep a check on executive actions and practices, such investigation can be kept on the general level and the committees required to turn over any evidence of violations of the law to a federal grand jury. The compilers of "subversive lists" can be required to give quasi-judicial hearings to organizations *before* they are "listed." Many responsible men contend that the FBI could be required to dispense with anonymous informers without greatly jeopardizing its effectiveness.

There is, of course, no substitute for individual responsibility to the tenets of a free society, yet naive faith in the vitality of our democratic system is no substitute for continuous, intelligent, pragmatic institutional and legal reform to keep pace with the changing historical context in which democracy must operate.

GORDON GRAHAM.

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THE UNDEBATED ISSUES

EVEN at the emotional height of the Army-McCarthy hearings, a surprisingly high percentage of Americans remained sublimely indifferent. This is one of the findings of Samuel A. Stouffer's study, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*. Stouffer's pollsters found that almost one-third of the large cross-section of Americans they interviewed were at a complete loss when asked to name even one Congressman or Senator who was taking a leading part in investigating Communism.

Oddly enough, here in this country where the opinion of the individual citizen bears a greater political weight than perhaps anywhere else on earth, there is an established anti-politics tradition. It manifests itself frequently. Even politicos themselves appeal to the tradition. One of the nastiest things McCarthy could think to say about Harry S. Truman was that the former President was "a cheap little politician." President Eisenhower's followers take great pride in pointing out that he is "above politics" —which to me sounds like saying that a bishop is "above religion." A standard newspaper obituary cliché has it that the deceased was a "statesman" and "no mere politician."

It is bad enough when ordinary citizens belittle politics. But when politicians themselves deride the art, the matter becomes more serious. A politician who claims to look down on politics may actually be an extremely dangerous man. He seems to imply that he is not bound by the mundane rules of compromise nor limited to the politically possible. Supposedly, he has some super-political way of getting things done that makes such restrictions unnecessary. Happily, though, most of the adverse talk about politics coming from politicians is insincere. President Eisenhower, despite his followers' boast, has turned out to be a superb politician. McCarthy is never more the politician than when he is deriding his calling.

But for all that, it is a somber fact that most Americans are not particularly concerned with politics. As always, the number of citizens actually voting remains small, and too many of those who do manage to find the polls arrive uninformed about issues and candidates alike. Professor Stouffer points out that even with our fabulously developed mass communications, personal worries, family concerns and immediate needs rule out any active political interest for great numbers of Americans. The interested, articulate minority bears a greater responsibility for the national well-being than they sometimes realize.

In the McCarthy controversy, two distinct minorities were enjoined—the motley supporters of the Senator *versus* that amorphous group which crusaded so long and so fiercely against his influence—the anti-McCarthyites. The great number of Americans in between shifted their weight from time to time, as the opinion polls show. McCarthy's stock went up and down. But these two basic alignments remained fairly constant.

Senator McCarthy of course consistently tried to give the impression that opposition to him was necessarily Communist-inspired, if not Communist-directed. There were parallel attempts on the other side to brand McCarthy's supporters as a gang of Gerald L. K. Smiths. These charges were silly. The real strength in both camps was found in good citizens, patriotically motivated, who rallied because they thought something precious was at stake. Both groups wanted desperately to serve the common good. But it was very clear that they had quite distinct—and largely conflicting—ideas of what the common good demanded.

There were great differences in the two groups' understanding of democracy. Each seemed to mean something different by "Americanism." It was unfortunate that the controversy was focused around a complex, stormy personality like Senator McCarthy. Because of this emotional aspect, the conflicting viewpoints and beliefs were largely buried under a barrage of charges and countercharges. There was no true argument—none of that reasonable and reasoned "continuing debate" about which the founding fathers spoke. There was, rather, a brawl—a messy, mindless brawl.

A brawl means passion instead of reason, a dedication to partisanship taking the place of a devotion to truth for its own sake. A brawl means wounds, and I fear it will be a long time before the wounds made during the McCarthy controversy will be forgotten. The differences that existed remain. The McCarthy controversy was rather like a war. The victory—if the eclipse of McCarthy can be deemed a victory for his opponents—did not prove who was right; it proved which side was ultimately stronger. The central issues still remain to be debated.

But before there can be any debate, suspicion will have to be dissipated. An atmosphere of mutual trust will have to be regained. It will not do for one large group of Americans to think that another large group is unconcerned about national security and either secretly or stupidly lined up with America's enemies. It will not do, either, for the other large group to think that its opponents are intent on whittling down traditional freedoms, instating political conformity as the basic doctrine of a latter-day "Americanism," and so little committed to American institutions that they can be talked into withdrawing their support of them by a glib demagogue.

These two large groups of Americans still think ill of each other. They do not trust each other. They can hardly talk to each other. What happens, in a case like that, to the "continuing debate" that should keep democracy alive? It can become a continuing war.

JOHN COGLEY.

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Assault on UNESCO

PAUL JACOBS

IT would hardly be surprising if the children of Los Angeles substituted "pro-UNESCO and anti-UNESCO" or "pro-human relations and anti-human relations" for their more traditional games of "cops and robbers" or "cowboys and Indians." For even the children are aware of the violent struggle carried on in the past few months for three seats on the Los Angeles Board of Education—a struggle in which UNESCO has been made the key issue. The anti-UNESCO group, presently in control of the board, has already won one of the three seats with the other two still to be decided in the run-off election on May 31. An additional candidate for a fourth seat was unopposed.

The struggle for the three seats will hardly be more than a tiny footnote, in very small type, to the history of the twentieth, the political century. But from a position close to it, the contest gives the appearance of being a microcosm of a controversy characteristic of present day America. And because controversy, like an agar-agar culture, generally seems to flourish best in a warm climate, the Los Angeles school board election presents both participants and viewers with two fairly clear and well-defined positions. The kind of education to be given Los Angeles children has become a highly politicalized issue. In any discussion of the election UNESCO, human relations and school texts involve questions likely to get extremely emotional and highly charged responses.

Just how charged the issue is may not be too clear to the casual short-time visitor who has come to Los Angeles only to bake his brains in the warm sun. But to the permanent resident the presence of bumper and window stickers adorning automobiles, the huge ads on billboards, the radio and TV announcements and the vitriolic outbursts in the news and editorial columns of the Los Angeles *Times* and the *Herald-Express* all denote a serious struggle for control of the public school system. Indeed, the very viciousness of the group campaigning on an anti-UNESCO platform has surprised even many of its supporters.

Los Angeles school boards have not, in recent years, been noted for either a high degree of civic responsibility or great intelligence. In a city of enormous and rapid growth like Los Angeles, school board elections tend to draw little response from the electorate. As a result, it was not difficult for incumbent board members to be constantly re-elected with little public notice ever given their activities. Only when it was disclosed that one board member, visiting Chicago, was receiving long distance health treatments from a Los Angeles "nature doctor's" black box, complete with dials, while other board members were receiving financial payments from the suppliers of the school system, was public attention directed to the board.

The result of the health and financial disclosures was the resignation of the black box addict and the resignation, trial and conviction of the money addicts. But their replacements were appointed by the remaining board members so that the essential character of the board remained unchanged. At one point, in 1953, five of the seven board members had been appointed, rather than elected.

THE character of the school board was clearly revealed in 1952-1953 when the use of teacher materials dealing with UNESCO and human relations was first protested by pressure groups. The first object for the attack of the groups was a teacher's guide called "The E in UNESCO." The campaign against the use of this teaching guide was led by the Hearst paper, the *Herald-Express;* a far-right woman's Republican group called Pro-America; and the politically reactionary Freedom Clubs of the Rev. James Fifield's Congregational Church. Powerful elements of the American Legion supported this threesome as did the *Tidings,* official organ of the Catholic archdiocese. The *Tidings* publicly reflects what are said to be the private views held by Cardinal McIntyre, who is known to consider the UN to be "godless" and "a tool of the Kremlin." But with the exception of the material published by the *Tidings,* no public statement of a Catholic position has ever been made. However, the Cardinal's views are well-known and constitute a real pressure force.

By January 1953, the appointee board of education had completely succumbed to the outside pressures. The UNESCO teachers' guide was thrown out together with a United Nations' essay contest. In the spring of 1953, the three incumbent appointees whose terms had expired were elected to the board, proving once again that incumbents are always odds-on favorites for re-election to any position.

The anti-UNESCO and politically isolationist group

Mr. Jacobs is a labor relations consultant now living in Los Angeles.

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won another victory in 1953 when the board, under pressure, abandoned a Ford Foundation project to provide for desperately needed teacher training. The project had been initiated by the then superintendent of schools, Alexander Stoddard, and had been approved by the board. But the board reversed itself in the face of attacks by the anti-UNESCO groups upon the Ford Foundation, described by them as being "Red," "socialistic," "one-world," etc., etc. According to Dr. Stoddard, "certain influences in our community that are destroying other worthy projects played a considerable role in necessitating the abandonment of this very worthwhile proposal."

Dr. Stoddard retired in 1954 and the board was thus relieved of any further official irritation from within the staff. In the meantime, the public removal of "The E In UNESCO" was followed by the secret removal of still another teachers' guide, "Developing Human Relations In The Elementary School."

Additionally, in October, 1954, the board removed fifteen books from use in the school system. They included *Intercultural Education in American Schools* by William Vickery, *Brothers Under The Skin* by Carey McWilliams, *We Call It Human Nature* by Paul Grabbe, *The Growing Human Family* by Minco Masini and *How Man Discovered His Body* by Sarah Riedman. (All these books are listed in the Standard Catalogue for High School Libraries.)

The eagle-eyed scrutiny of the board, Legion, Pro-America, and the like, is not limited to merely text or library books. Films, too, such as the University of Oregon's "Human Growth" and "Human Beginnings" were removed from the elementary and high schools, as were such human relations films as "Brotherhood of Man," "Sing A Song of Friendship," and "Boundary Lines."

THE effects upon the professional staff and teachers of the board's own attitude as well as its subservience to pressure groups have been devastating. A 1954 poll of two hundred and fifty high school political science and history teachers revealed that 54½% of the teachers believed that their pupils were "being deprived educationally as a result of the uproar about controversial issues or as a result of the Board of Education's policy on teaching about the UN and UNESCO."

The same poll, conducted by the Los Angeles *Mirror*, showed that 55½% of the teachers were fearful that teaching controversial subjects might result in the loss of their jobs. Only 47% of the teachers felt as free in 1954 as they did five or ten years ago to discuss thoroughly and honestly all phases of social studies, history, geography, political science and international studies, according to the poll.

During the 1955 celebration of Brotherhood Week, sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the L. A. school system was offered the free distribution of a bibliography of outstanding books to be used as suggested reading materials. The offer was rejected because the board said "Extensive reference materials in your (NCCJ) bibliography would require committee review."

But the teachers have begun to fight back. Four school board posts were up for election in the April primary and a number of groups, including the Affiliated Teachers of Los Angeles, minority and labor groups, joined together to contest three of the positions while leaving one incumbent unopposed. Their three candidates were Georgiana Hardy, a TV commentator long active in civic affairs, Lawrence Martin, and Emery Petty, a Republican and Democrat respectively who have also both been active in civic affairs. Opposing them were three of the old appointees plus a host of new candidates.

Two of the candidates, Mrs. Hardy and Mr. Petty, will go into the run-off election on May 31st. Martin lost in the primary. The results of the primary were proclaimed by the *Herald-Express* with "UNESCO Foes To Rule Board," a headline characteristic of the campaign. On election day a "news" story in the same paper defined UNESCO teachings as advocating the "dropping of American history from the school curriculum. . . ."

Charges of "outside pressure" and "huge funds" were made against the Hardy-Martin-Petty slate. The Los Angeles *Times*, in endorsing the incumbents, stated that the teachers' slate "would use the public schools to create a Huxley-type brave new world."

In spite of this opposition, Mrs. Hardy rolled up a vote of 156,000 to achieve a majority of 60,000 over her nearest opponent. She appears to have the best chance of election while Mr. Petty faces a tougher battle. But it is not inconceivable that a widespread smear attack will be waged against both candidates in the last days of the campaign in an attempt to make sure that not even a single voice of liberalism will ever be raised in school board discussions. A minority of even one might mean the future undoing of the remaining six.

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Continuity in Russian Thought

THE MIND OF MODERN RUSSIA. Edited by Hans Kohn. Rutgers University Press. $5.50.

By MICHAEL HARRINGTON

HANS KOHN introduces this book on Russia with a quotation from Guizot: "When nations have existed for a long and glorious time, they cannot break with their past, whatever they do; they are influenced by it at the very moment when they work to destroy it; in the midst of the most glaring transformations they remain fundamentally in character and destiny such as their history has formed them." The notion is a fruitful one in general, but its particularly timeliness is related to the development of the Russion Revolution. For here we have a movement which proclaims a radical break with the past, in the name of a revolutionary idealism, and yet actually manifests a continuity with the past, in terms of a political barbarism.

Berdyaev, for instance, used this concept in emphasizing the continuity between Stalinist Marxism and the various populist and slavophil currents of nineteenth century Russia. Issac Deutscher's biography, *Stalin,* portrays its subject as a Byzantine herisiarch. And in a stimulating essay in the October, 1954 issue of *The Review of Politics,* Karl Wittfogel advances a quotation from a little-known article of Lenin which indicates that even the leader of the October Revolution was aware of the possibility of a retrogressive movement as a result of the backwardness of Russian society.

The Stalinsts themselves have adopted the Guizot point of view. Prior to the mid-thirties, the official Russian history devoted one volume to all that had gone before 1917 and an equal volume to the short span of the Revolution. In the mid-thirties, this was changed. Faced with the preparation for a "patriotic" war, the Russian past became a proper subject for glorification and study: thus the Eisenstein movies about Alexander Nevsky and Ivan. More recently, Moscow issued an English translation of one of the authors excerpted by Professor Kohn, Chernychevsky, with a sympathetic introduction.

Within this context, Professor Kohn has certainly produced a welcome volume. For here, briefly introduced, are the westernizers, socialists like Herzen, the almost prophetic Tyuchev (who wrote, "One cannot understand Russia by reason/ And measure her by a common yardstick./ She has a peculiar nature./ One must simply believe in Russia"), the Slavophils and liberals—a representative sampling broad enough to mark the continuity of nineteenth and twentieth century Russia. One's only complaint is that the introductory nature of the volume limits the amount that can be quoted from each author. Yet, at the same time, this fact should give *The Mind of Russia* a wide, non-academic audience.

However, care must be taken in reading this book, for it would be easy to make generalizations which Hans Kohn in no way implies. For example, one is struck by the note of prophecy, repeated over and over; the glimpses of Stalinism which seem uncanny. These are explained, of course, not on the grounds of any strange powers, but because the authors of these statements were involved in the currents which influenced the development of Stalinism.

Another, and far more dangerous, generalization which must be avoided is the conclusion that Stalinism is *simply* the continuation of this or that nineteenth century trend: simply pan-Slavism, simply Nachaev's terrorism, etc. Whittaker Chambers, for instance, sometimes sees the opportunistic twentieth century bureaucrat as cast in the same mold as the nineteenth century terrorist. Still others have professed to find in Stalinism a mere extension of Tsarism.

The continuity cannot be emphasized to this extent. For along with the continuity, there are such elements as the fantastic change brought about by industrialization and the conscious direction chosen by Lenin and Stalin. (Stalinism's success in the backward areas, especially in Asia, can hardly be attributed to a continuation of Tsarist policies.) If this qualification is given, then the Revolution and its terrible degeneration and reversal is seen as an inter-penetration of the past and the present, neither a radical break nor an unbroken development.

For introducing the element of continuity to a wide public, Hans Kohn deserves our thanks. It is only when books like these are available —when our rational analysis is brought to bear on the subject of Russia—that we possess the information necessary to forming an intelligent policy. In the past, this information has too often been lacking *The Mind of Russia* now makes a significant part of it available to a general audience.

Mr. Maugham on the Novel

THE ART OF FICTION. An Introduction to Ten Novels and Their Authors. By W. Somerset Maugham. Doubleday. $4.50.

By GERALD WEALES

THE Art of Fiction is certainly not what its title implies. The few remarks on creativity in general and on novel-writing in particular that inch their way into the book, almost by accident, are so vague that they are meaningless or are so commonplace that they are uninformative. The volume is simply a collection of ten essays, slightly revised versions of the introductions that Somerset Maugham wrote for a series of abridgements of what he considers the ten best novels ever written.

Maugham's treatment of the ten novelists—Fielding, Jane Austen, Stendhal, Balzac, Dickens, Flau-

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bert, Melville, Emily Brontë, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy—makes no pretense at depth. The essays are plainly designed for the reader who knows nothing about the authors, who has come on the novels for the first time. Since it is unlikely that anyone with any real knowledge of the novelists would pick up an abridged version of any of their works, the essays could have done their job respectably for the audience for which they were intended had they been left quietly in the niche they were expected to fill. Now that they have been gathered under a somewhat pretentious title they seem to be demanding an audience which they cannot command.

Maugham opens each essay with a brief life of the author, which in most cases wisely and admittedly depends upon one of the standard biographical works, for instance Chapman's *Jane Austen Facts and Problem* or Josephson's *Stendhal.* These sketches are written in the normally pedantic style that is common to introductions to the classics; only occasionally, as in the Dickens chapter where there is a digression on the United States, is the work marked with Maugham's own personality.

Mr. Maugham seems strangely interested in the sex life of his subjects, dwelling on affairs or the absence of them, whether or not the question is particularly relevant to the novel under discussion, and often with an embarrassing coyness ("the charming, but not particularly chaste, actress, Anne Oldfield"). He psychologizes to an excessive extent, particularly when he wanders into the fertile ground where the Brontës grew, lingering over Emily's sadism and reading wish-fulfillment into every moment of violence in *Wuthering Heights.* This attitude is not strange when one remembers that in *The Summing Up* he assigns a therapeutic value to his writing of *Of Human Bondage.*

Maugham has a way of solving all scholarly problems by simply stating that such and such is true or false ("I have no doubt at all that Emily, and Emily alone, wrote *Wuthering Heights*") and he fills

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in any blank spots in his subjects' lives by conjecturing what happened. Conjecture is, of course, the method of scholars, although they seldom admit it, but most scholarly inventions, like the new one about Marlowe's having written Shakespeare's plays, are shored up with a respectable amount of research.

Maugham's general statements on novelists and the way they work are even less rewarding than the biographical material. Scattered through the ten essays are occasional remarks on style and intention, some of which are useful, but he masses his discussion of the art of fiction in an opening chapter and a conclusion, which incidentally includes a literary party attended by the ten authors which is so cute that even Hendrik Willem Van Loon would have blanched at it. Maugham is chiefly concerned to impress upon the reader that a novel is a form of diversion, simply a good story, a point of view that he continually says that he cannot repeat too often, although frankly the repetition is more than sufficient.

In these instances Mr. Maugham is at least on practical ground, for he is defending his behavior as novelist and editor. When, in the conclusion, he gets involved in creative instinct and inspiration, terms as vague to him as they are to most writers who try to deal with them, he gets lost in the forest of practical aesthetics. He tries to find his way out by positing generalizations based on his ten authors, but in each case he must admit to a few exceptions. The conclusion remains remarkably inconclusive.

Persecution

THE SILENT CHURCH. By Lino Gussoni and Aristede Brunello. Veritas, (Box 234, New York 13.) $5.

By GEORGE N. SHUSTER

THIS book might be called a modern Acts of the Martyrs. It reprints many documents bearing

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on the persecution of the Catholic Chu[illegible]sia and the so-called satellite countries, enumerates the more spectacular trials, and provides authenticated lists of bishops and priests who have been liquidated, in one manner or another, by the Communists. It is therefore a chronicle of horror, sacrifice and heroism. Set down without the slightest trace of literary adornment, the narrative is to some extent further handicapped by awkwardness of expression, no doubt due to the translator. Yet for all that this volume merits a place in every library that can find room for it.

The treatment is the only possible one, namely summary of events in each country. Thus in what is said about Albania, one learns that of the ninety-four monks who in 1944 lived in the monasteries, only two priests and eleven brothers are still alive and are in hiding to avoid arrest. Hitherto no such accurate statistics have been available, but there is evidence to indicate that the sources to which the authors have access assure the reliability of their reporting. The documents presented do not of course form more than a small part of those extant, but they are all pertinent and significant.

But for anyone who skims through the book, it will become plain that the Communist pattern is everywhere the same, being brutal suppression of those who for one reason or other oppose it. How strange it is that, for all our vocal protests against the Kremlin and its disciples, so few Americans take time out to forget for a moment how they can achieve peace of heart, mind, body and so forth in order to meditate upon the possibly bleak truth that those who have suffered persecution for justice's sake are blessed.

REVIEWERS

Michael Harrington writes frequently on political and social questions for The Commonweal and other magazines.

Gerald Weales is at present doing advanced studies at Columbia.

George Shuster, president of Hunter College, is the author of *Religion Behind the Iron Curtain*.

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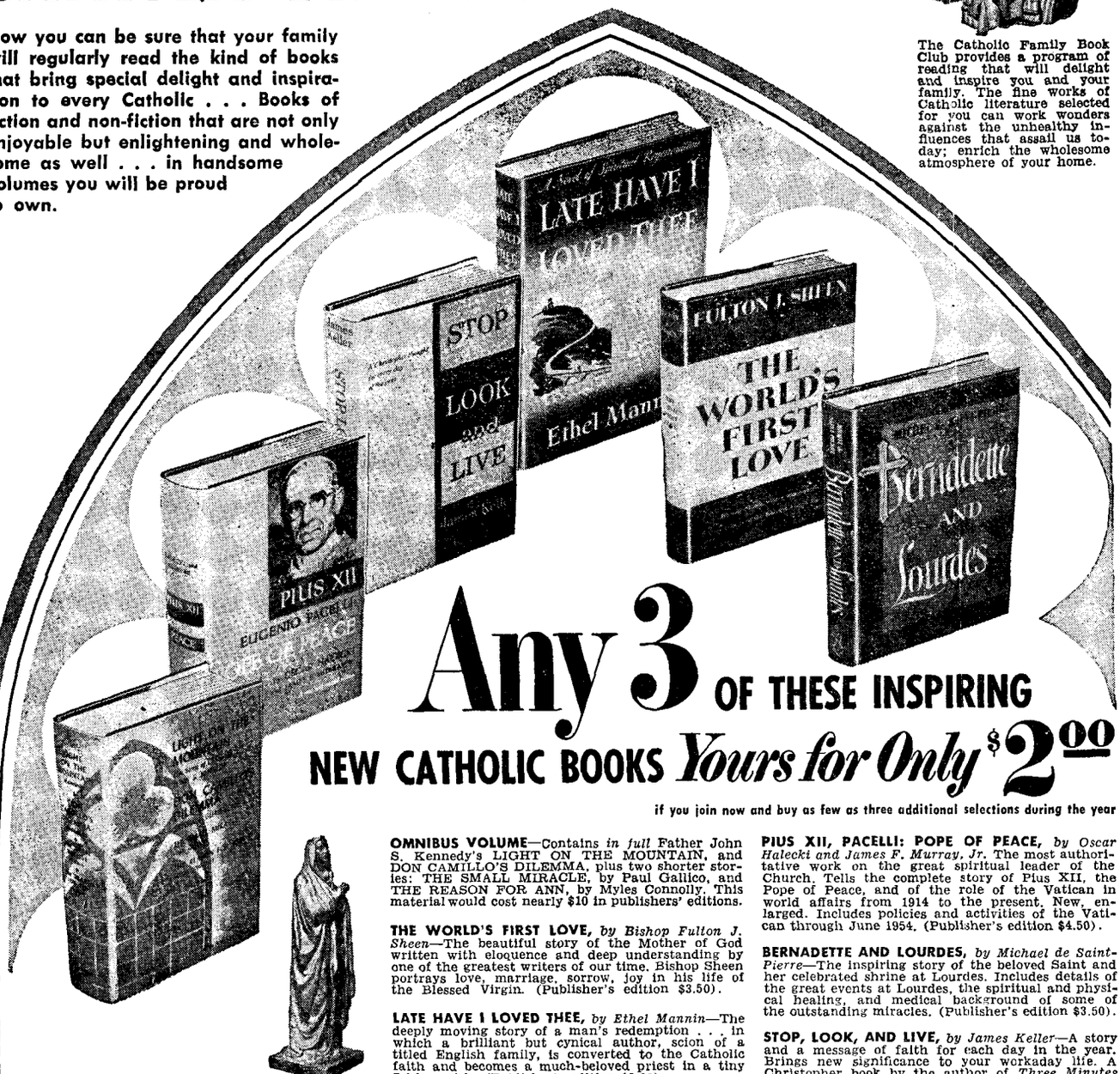

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